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SUBJECT: RUSSIA'S INSTITUTE FOR DEMOCRACY AND COOPERATION

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¶1. (SBU) Summary. As Russia's new Institute for Democracy and Cooperation prepares to open its New York and Paris offices, Institute Chairman Kucherena claimed to us that its purpose was not "propaganda," but to provide a Russian perspective on human rights and democracy and to aid in the creation of common standards for measuring them. He laid out the organization's structural priorities, defended the organization's independence from the GOR, and explained the source of funding (mostly government grants). In a subsequent press conference, Kucherena introduced well-known analyst Andranik Migranyan, as head of the New York office, and pro-Kremlin NGO leader Nataliya Narochnitskaya, as head of the Paris office. The Institute's priorities not surprisingly echo Putin's efforts to project resurgent Russia's increasing "soft power" abroad. End Summary.

Nuts and Bolts

¶2. (SBU) In a January 24 meeting with Embassy, founder and Chairman of the Institute of Democracy and Cooperation Anatoliy Kucherena stated that in his position as Chairman of the Public Chamber Commission on Law Enforcement Bodies, Power Agencies, and Reform of the Judicial System, he had proposed the creation of a Russian human rights NGO at a meeting with Putin in early 2007. Fifteen Russian regional and inter-regional NGOs, as well as American and Western European human rights organizations, were involved in consultations about the Institute's format before Putin announced its creation at the October 2007 EU-Russia Summit in Mafra (reftel).

¶3. (U) Kucherena explained that the Institute's Paris and New York offices would each be staffed by 10 employees, with an equal number of American or French experts and Russian analysts in each office. The Institute had obtained office space in central Paris, and it continues to look for prime real estate in New York. At a January 28 press conference, Kucherena announced executive directors of the two field offices:

-- President of the Historical Prospect Foundation Nataliya Narochnitskaya will head the Institute's Paris office. Narochnitskaya was previously the Deputy Chairwoman of the International Relations Committee in the Duma as a member of the nationalist Rodina party, and spent eight years at the Soviet Mission to the UN in New York. She was a critic of NATO intervention in the former Yugoslavia, and was known for her opposition to globalization, supranational organizations, and loss of national sovereignty.

-- MGIMO professor and former Yeltsin advisor Andranik Migranyan will head the New York Office. Migranyan, a member of the Public Chamber and vice-president of the NGO

Soglaskiye, has been an outspoken, but moderate, advocate of the Kremlin's worldview, as well as a leader in Armenian-Russian circles.

Key Priorities of the Institute

¶4. (U) Kucherena, Migranyan, and Narochnitskaya stated that the primary goal of the Institute was to cooperate with non-governmental organizations in Russia and abroad for the development of civil society institutions and democracy. The Institute plans to "monitor" and establish dialogue with Western states -- and eventually Russia's own neighborhood -- in the areas of:

- Democratic practices;
- Human rights and religious freedoms;
- Ethnic minorities, including xenophobia.

At the press conference, Narochnitskaya noted that the Institute would take the socio-economic situation in a country into account when inspecting the human rights situation, and singled out Turkey, France, and Latvia as countries where the situation of ethnic minorities was problematic.

¶5. (SBU) Kucherena replayed to us the Kremlin's line that this was a public initiative, "without state control," although it would bring in politicians, as well. Kucherena described the Institute as a "political Davos." At the press conference, however, Migranyan admitted that the work of the Institute would be "coordinated" with the Russian authorities, who expected joint work between public and

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government experts. He compared this to analysts moving in and out of government in Western countries, giving the example of an American who transitioned from the Department of State, to the Carnegie Center, to the NSC, and finally to the Kissinger Foundation.

"Perspective, not Propaganda"

¶6. (SBU) Kucherena told us repeatedly that neither he nor Putin saw the Institute as an instrument of propaganda. Kucherena insisted that both Western and Russian press were completely off base in claiming that the Institute was anti-Western or even a Russian version of "Freedom House." The aim of the Institute was to introduce a Russian perspective on human rights and democracy. America already had influence on Russia, but Russian influence on America was sorely lacking, and the Institute could help the world understand Russia in its cultural context. He asserted that the Institute would help "raise Russia's profile in the world and improve Russia's image." However, Kucherena said that Russia's image abroad would not be improved by criticizing others, but by demonstrating its achievements.

¶7. (SBU) When asked about the possibility of preparing human rights reports on western countries, Kucherena said the Institute would not issue reports similar to the U.S. Human Rights Report, but the experts would prepare analytic papers on "various issues." Narochnitskaya and Migranyan said they intended to fight against attempts to "monopolize control" over norms and standards of democracy and human rights, although both promised to monitor "problems, not states." Kucherena added that the Institute would help develop common standards for monitoring democracy and human rights, and to spark debate in areas of common concern. Narochnitskaya noted that "this was not retaliation," and that there were thousands of organizations which study human rights in "every country other than their own."

Financing

¶18. (U) Kucherena stated that the budget for the Institute was still unclear, as administrative issues were still being considered. He mentioned that the Institute was still negotiating prices for real estate in New York, along with salary negotiations for experts, and that the budget "would be approved later." (NOTE: When pressed by a Spanish journalist for a dollar figure during the press conference, Kucherena became defensive.)

¶19. (SBU) Although the Russian MFA told us shortly after Putin's announcement in Mafra that the GOR was planning to invest more than one million euros in the project, Kucherena was vague about sources of funding. He told us that "as much private money as possible" would be used to fund the Institute, and expressed confidence that Russian businessmen would be active in its financing. However, he admitted that "as with most Western NGOs," the Institute would start off with government grants.

Comment

¶11. (SBU) The goals of the Institute remain ambiguous, but the intent is obviously to continue Putin's efforts to project Russian influence globally. This not-quite nongovernmental organization is a novel step in Russia's expanding outreach efforts. Mirgranyan and Narochnitskaya are capable, and we expect them to be energetic, pro-Kremlin public figures when they take up their new duties.

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